

7th Transportation Battalion



*7th Transportation Battalion, crest (l) and coat of arms(r)
mouseover each for a description*

World War II

Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment (HHD), 7th Quartermaster Troop Transport Battalion was constituted on 17 June 1943 and was activated at Camp Livingston, Louisiana on 25 August 1943. The battalion was redesignated on 30 November 1943 as the HHD, 7th Quartermaster Battalion (Mobile). The 7th Battalion was inactivated 14 November 1945 at Ft. Leonard Wood, Missouri. For its participation in WWII the battalion received Campaign Participation credit for the Rhineland and Central Europe campaigns.

Cold War

Quartermaster truck units were given to the Transportation Corps following World War II. While on inactive status, the 7th Battalion was redesignated and reorganized as the HHD, 7th Transportation Corps Truck Battalion on 1 August 1946. On 16 October 1952, the battalion was redesignated as the HHD, 7th Transportation Corps Truck Battalion and was allotted to the Regular Army. The 7th Battalion was again activated at Camp Atterbury, Indiana, on 17 November 1952.

The 7th Battalion was redesignated the HHD, 7th Transportation Battalion (Truck) at Fort Campbell, Kentucky on 25 June 1959. There it supported the 101st Airborne Division. The 86th Transportation Company was assigned to the battalion and on 17 October 1962, the advance party of the 151st Light Truck Company arrived from Fort Eustis, Virginia. On 24 October, the 151st Light Truck was transferred from the 27th Transportation Battalion to the 7th Battalion.¹

A select number of soldiers from the 151st Light Truck were attached to the 86 Medium Truck Company and sent to Thailand for a training exercise on 31 May 1963. The bulk of

¹ Lloyd Riggs email to Richard Killblane, February 14, 2008

the 151st went TDY at Fort Bragg with the 36th Battalion on July 22, 1963 and TDY to Germany October and November 1963.²

During 1964, the Fort Irwin supported Exercise DESERT STRIKE conducted by the US Strike Command. This large Army-Air Force exercise took place in a 12-million acre area of the Mojave Desert in California and Arizona centered on the Colorado River. The total Army troop participation was 89,788. The 86th Medium Truck deployed to Ludlow, California in support of the 1st and 2nd Battalions, 506th Airborne Infantry, which played the Opposing Force during Exercise DESERT STRIKE from June through July 1964.³

Vietnam War

In 1962, communist insurgents launched a guerrilla war to usurp the unification elections in the Republic of South Vietnam. The United States then sent advisors and helicopter companies to South Vietnam to stabilize the government. In 1965, it became clear that South Vietnam would fall without greater assistance from the United States. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, (MACV) called for an increase in the number of US troops to serve in the combat role against the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army.

The 151st Light Truck deployed to Vietnam aboard the *USNS Gordon* and arrived on 2 September 1965 and was assigned to the 394th Terminal Battalion at Qui Nhon. In October 1965, the company was attached to the newly arrived 27th Transportation Battalion. On 26 May 1966, the 151st received orders to move down to Cam Ranh Bay. It sailed in two groups aboard LSTs on 28 and 31 May. The company became operational on 1 June and was attached to the 10th Terminal Battalion then to the 36th Transportation Battalion in August 1966. On 24 October 1966, the 151st convoyed to its new home at Tuy Hoa where it was attached to the Tuy Hoa Subarea Command (Provisional). There it conducted beach clearance from Vung Ro Bay to Tuy Hoa Airbase and supply the 1st Brigade of the 4th Infantry Division, the 101st Airborne Division, and the 28th ROK Regiment Combat Team. On 17 November, the company logged in its one-millionth mile since arriving in Vietnam. On 18 November the 564th Transportation Platoon (light Truck) was attached to the 151st. On 1 December, the 151st was attached to the 39th Transportation Battalion. The 86th Medium Truck deployed to Vietnam and arrived on 12 August 1966 and was also attached to the 7th Battalion at Long Binh.

The 7th Battalion, known as the “Orient Express,” deployed to Long Binh, Vietnam, during the second buildup on 2 August 1966. The battalion was assigned to the 48th Transportation Group until 1971, when it was assigned to the 4th Transportation Command under the US Army Support Command, Saigon. The 7th Battalion assumed control of all the tractor and trailer companies: 10th, 62nd, 233rd, 446th, 534th, and 572nd Medium Truck Companies and 538th Medium Petroleum Truck.

The 6th and 7th Transportation Battalions were components of the 48th Transportation Group, which supported American units in the III (entire zone) and IV (limited) Corps

² Riggs email, February 14, 2008.

³ Fort Irwin, Global Security.com, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/fort-irwin.htm>; and Riggs email, February 14, 2008.

Tactical Zones and conducted the only major sustained convoy operations in areas that had long been disrupted by the Viet Cong. The battalions often worked in conjunction with each other on operations. The 6th Battalion operated 2 ½ and 5-ton trucks with S&P trailers while 7th Battalion operated M52 trucks. The two battalions conducted port clearance in the Saigon area, which included the commercial port of Saigon and military ports of Vung Tau and Newport, the latter adjacent to Long Binh. The 163rd Transportation Company (Light Truck) was assigned to the 6th Battalion in 1965 at Chu Lai. In port clearance operations, the 6th Battalion cleared all types of general cargo from the main port of Saigon to the US port facility at Newport and Vung Tau, provided priority support to the Air Cargo Section of the 8th Aerial Port at Tan Son Nhut Airbase, and transported all classes of ammunition from barge discharge sites to ammunition storage areas at Long-Binh, Tan Son Nhut Air Base and Bien Hoa Air Base. Most of the short haul runs took only a few hours to reach their destinations. The trucks drove on modern highways and hastily improved jungle roads.

In late September 1967, the 48th Group in conjunction with the 9th Infantry Division Service and Transportation Battalion needed to send light, fast, armored convoys to run the dangerous road to Dong Tam. Major Larry Ondic, of the 6th Transportation Battalion, had pedestal mounts for machineguns and steel plating put on many trucks for a night convoy to move elements of the 9th Infantry Division. The convoy ran without incident and commander of the 9th Division loved the hardened concept and the 48th Group began running routine night convoys to Dong Tam and Xuan Loc. That was as close to a gun truck as the 48th Group came.⁴

From 26 September to 22 November 1967, the 534th Medium Truck “Charioteers” Company, commanded by CPT Lynn A. Lentz, and a squad from the 556th Transportation Company moved into the Northern I Corps Tactical Zone. They hauled critical supplies and construction materials from the beach ramp at Dong Ha to the US Marine fire base at Con Thien. The fire base was so close to the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) that North Vietnamese artillery had the camp zeroed in so a platoon from the 11th Mobile Construction Battalion was building stronger bunkers that could withstand direct impacts from the 152mm shells. Because the enemy guns had the camp zeroed in, the Marine commander would not allow more than two trucks on the hill at a time. The convoy would halt about five miles from the camp at 100-meter intervals then on command, two trucks would race the hazardous five miles to the camp, then negotiate poor dirt roads destroyed bridges to dump their loads on the construction site. This was a race against time to beat the arrival of the monsoon.⁵

A 48th Group convoy was ambushed on 25 August 1968. It was a typical monsoon season day. The clouds were low, visibility was poor, and intermittent rain drenched the area. The large resupply convoy (81 trucks of the 48th Transportation Group, the 7th Battalion’s parent unit) assembled at Long Binh, near Saigon. The convoy was assembled with reefer

⁴ Larry Ondic conversation with Richard Killblane; and “In Vietnam the Truck is Still King,” *Hi-Lite*, Feb 1968.

⁵ “Truckers Help Build Defenses of Con Thien,” *Stars and Stripes*, 1967; and LTC E. W. Coyne, Letter: Recognition of Services Renders, 7th Transportation Battalion, 5 December 1967.

trucks in the front, followed by supply trucks, and fuel and ammo trucks in the rear. This configuration was used, so if a fuel or ammo truck were disabled it would not stop the entire convoy and the rest of the convoy could speed out of the hostile area. Convoys resupplied the 25th Infantry Divisions (ID) 1st Brigade camp, daily at Tay Ninh located just seven miles from the Cambodian border in the Tay Ninh province. The famed Ho Chi Minh trail ran near the province. Tay Ninh is located 45 miles northwest of Saigon. This convoy normally took a few hours to complete, because the mandated convoy speed limit was 20 miles per hour.

The convoy proceeded on Main Supply Route (MSR) 1 from Saigon through the village Hoc Mon, west past the 25th ID base camp at Cu Chi, through the village of Trang Bang, across the bridge at Soui Cao Creek (also called Soui-Cide Bridge, because of a large number of ambushes that occurred there) on to Go Dau Ha at the intersection of MSR 1 and MSR 22. The convoy next turned northwest onto MSR 22 through the village of Ap Nhi—about 4.5 miles northwest of the Go Dau Ha intersection. The convoy would be completed after passing through Tay Ninh about 20 miles from Ap Nhi. Road security from the Go Dau Ha intersection was the responsibility of the 1st Brigade of the 25th ID, but that was impossible due to a reduction of force ordered by the Division's Commanding General. The reduction in force was the result of the feared third phase of the TET Offensive (Vietnamese Lunar New Year). The 1st and 3rd Brigades of the 25th ID usually secured the convoy route, but the 3rd Brigade was pulled back to Saigon to defend the city and its approach routes. From 17 to 24 August, the 1st Brigade fended off thirteen battalion or regimental attacks—including seven attacks on 1st Brigade bases. The 1st Brigade's Intelligence (S-2) determined that 16,000 North Vietnamese Army (NVA) combat ready troops of the 5th and 9th Divisions accompanied by an anti-aircraft battalion were leading the offensive with two attached VC battalions against the 1st Brigade. This was in contrast to the 25th ID's intelligence, which believed that Saigon was the target. The 25th ID then stripped the 1st Brigade of the 2/34th Armor, moving the unit back to Cu Chi, while still ordering the 1st Brigade to carry out all regular duties and that the "MSR clear and secure" mission should be supplied if time and manning allowed. This was a fatal mistake. The Brigade commander believed he could not defend his own bases let alone the MSR; he informed the 25th ID commander of his concerns. The 1st Brigade was left with three undermanned rifle companies, three undermanned mechanized infantry companies, and two 105-mm artillery batteries—there were no armor or armor cavalry units attached.

MSR 22 was flanked on the sides for about a mile by the Ap Nhi and the Ben Cui Rubber Plantation (known locally as Little Rubber). The Ap Nhi side was mostly farm land while the Little Rubber side had rubber trees growing to fifteen feet of the road. Between the trees and the road were a drainage ditch and an earthen berm. The 88th NVA Regiment elements moved into the Little Rubber on the night of 24 August and prepared to ambush the Tay Ninh resupply convoy. At 1145 hours the convoy entered the sleepy village of Ap Nhi. It was misting and raining and the ceiling was at about 200 feet. The convoy met a column of Army of the Republic of Viet Nam (ARVN) soldiers marching along the road. The column was marching on the north side of the MSR adjacent to the Little Rubber. The lead vehicles of the convoy had started to leave the village and the ammo

and fuel vehicle were alongside the column when ARVN soldiers opened fire on the convoy. The ARVN soldiers were actually VC and NVA dressed in ARVN uniforms. This was the signal to begin the ambush by the VC and NVA troops positioned in Little Rubber and enemy forces began an intense barrage of rocket, machine gun, and automatic weapons fire. A fuel truck was immediately hit and blown up stranding the remainder of the convoy. Thirty-one trucks in front of the destroyed fuel truck sped away, but 50 trucks were stuck in the mile long kill zone. Later an ammunition truck at the rear of the convoy was hit. The initial assault had hit its mark with those two vehicles—sealing the convoy in place. The next targets were gun jeeps and vehicles with radios. The NVA and VC had thoroughly planned the ambush. The ambush occurred at the southernmost limits 1st Brigade TOAR. None of the 1st Brigade's available artillery was within range of the ambush. The low ceiling prevented air support from initially being used.

7th Battalion Army Transporter, Sergeant William W. Seay, was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for his gallantry during the ambush. His citation reads, in part, "When his convoy was forced to stop, Sgt. Seay immediately dismounted and took a defensive position behind the wheels of a vehicle loaded with high-explosive ammunition. As the violent North Vietnamese assault approached to within 10 meters of the road, Sgt. Seay opened fire, killing 2 of the enemy. He then spotted a sniper in a tree approximately 75 meters to his front and killed him. When an enemy grenade was thrown under an ammunition trailer near his position, without regard for his own safety he left his protective cover, exposing himself to intense enemy fire, picked up the grenade, and threw it back to the North Vietnamese position, killing 4 more of the enemy and saving the lives of the men around him. Another enemy grenade landed approximately 3 meters from Sgt. Seay's position. Again Sgt. Seay left his covered position and threw the armed grenade back upon the assaulting enemy. After returning to his position he was painfully wounded in the right wrist; however, Sgt. Seay continued to give encouragement and direction to his fellow soldiers. After moving to the relative cover of a shallow ditch, he detected 3 enemy soldiers who had penetrated the position and were preparing to fire on his comrades. Although weak from loss of blood and with his right hand immobilized, Sgt. Seay stood up and fired his rifle with his left hand, killing all 3 and saving the lives of the other men in his location. As a result of his heroic action, Sgt. Seay was mortally wounded by a sniper's bullet."

Colonel Paul Swanson commanded the 48th Group beginning in November 1969. At that time, Lieutenant Colonel Orvil C. Metheny commanded the 6th Battalion and Lieutenant Colonel John D. Bruen commanded the 7th Battalion. Metheny went on to become a Brigadier General and Bruen attained the rank of Lieutenant General. Prior to Swanson, battalion commanders served only six-month tours in Vietnam. Swanson believed if combat commanders had to serve one-year tour, then logisticians should too; Metheny and Bruen each served one-year in Vietnam. Their continuity greatly enhanced truck battalion operations in Vietnam for the 48th Group. The battalions ran mostly "Round Robins" meaning they departed in the morning and returned at night. Swanson also rotated companies that performed line haul operations to the Rest and Recreation area. This ensured that all companies could take advantage of the vacation area and were even

provided a half of a day off when they delivered to there. Swanson assigned drivers their own truck and allowed the drivers to personalize them. Swanson believed the drivers would take care of their truck if they were allowed to add armor or paint the wheel hubs. Swanson and Metheny did oppose the use of gun trucks. Both believed the combat commander was responsible for convoy security and they did not want to interfere with the infantry's mission. Swanson told the infantry if they wanted ammunition and rations they had to keep the Viet Cong away from the convoys. Three serious ambushes occurred during Swanson's command.

The first to respond to the ambush were "Huey C Model" helicopters from the 25th Aviation Battalion. These aircraft were equipped with two door gunners, fourteen rockets, and a mini-gun. A Huey pilot saw friendly forces in the ditch and enemy soldiers were unloading the trucks and carrying the supplies into the tree line. The helicopters had a tough time engaging the enemy. The ceiling was still low and the regular angles of attack were impossible. The Huey's normally rolled in on the target with a steep dive from about 1500 feet—the low ceiling meant the pilots had to fire rockets flat often over or under shooting the target. It took eight hours for the division ground reaction force to arrive; the convoy was pinned down the entire time. The delay in the response was caused by a communications problem and the remoteness of the ambush location. Thirteen to fourteen transporters lost their lives in the ambush. Following the ambush the battalion installed 30-caliber machine guns on battalion jeeps. The division also began adding armored personnel carriers, tanks, armored cars, and helicopter air support to reinforce the convoys. Up until the Phu Con Bridge was built, convoys had to pass through Saigon. Going through Saigon made convoy travel time too long to return the same day. The bridge made the convoys safer and quicker.

For the 7th Battalion's service in Vietnam, the battalion received the Meritorious Unit Citations for July 1968 to March 1969 and April 1969 to September 1969. The battalion departed Vietnam on 29 March 1972 and was inactivated at Ft. Lewis, Washington, on 30 March 1972.

Post War

The Commander of 1st Corps Support Command (COSCOM) wanted the command and control of the motor truck companies to fall under a different transportation battalion and not the 46th General Support Group. LTC Paul Hurley activated the 774th Transportation Battalion (Motor Transport) (Provisional) in late 1972 with the idea that it would receive TOE status and adopt the honors and lineage of the 774th Transportation Group. The battalion assumed control of the 126th Medium Truck Company, 546th Light/Medium Truck Company, 839th Airborne Car Company, Corps (3/4-ton), 403rd Terminal Transfer Company, 140th and 172nd Cargo and Documentation Detachments. Different units at Fort Bragg gave up personnel billets each for the provisional battalion. The 330th Movement Control Battalion contributed 0-5 and CSM billets along with about a dozen other positions. In July 1972, the 330th Battalion was activated to manage the movement of soldiers, equipment and supplies for the XVIII Airborne Corps. The 774th Provisional Battalion answered directly to COSCOM. However, when the 774th Provisional Battalion received its TOE status it would become the 7th Battalion instead. The 7th

Transportation Battalion was reactivated in conjunction with a change of command ceremony on 21 July 1974. LTC William B. McGrath assumed command of the battalion. The 7th Battalion assumed the responsibilities of the 774th Provisional Battalion.

Operation Urgent Fury, Grenada

To curb the expansion of communism in Central America, President Reagan ordered the invasion of the Island of Grenada, Operation Urgent Fury, in the Caribbean in October 1983. The US Marines took the northern half of the island by amphibious assault while the Army Rangers seized the Point Salinas air Port by airborne insertion followed by the landing of the 82nd Airborne Division. The 403rd Cargo Transfer Company provide Arrival/Departure Airfield Control Group (A/DACG) and coordinated the flow of air traffic in and out of the tiny island.

The unit deployed soldiers to St. Croix, Virgin Islands following the aftermath of the effects of Hurricane Hugo in September 1989. The 403rd Cargo Transfer Company again provided A/DACG and upon arrival, organized and directed the movement of critically needed supplies and expedited the evacuation of stranded citizens.

Operation Just Cause, Panama

Drug indictments against the military leader of Panama, Manuel Noriega, created another US crisis in 1988. Southern Command developed two contingency plans, one for deployment and the other for offensive operations. The deployment plan initially required 96 hours of deployment into country to cover the infiltration of Special Operations Forces (SOF). The offensive plan called for simultaneous strikes at H-hour with the SOF targeting command and control facilities and the Army Forces neutralizing the Panamanian Defense Force (PDF). Essentially the SOF would cut the head off of the snake and the rest would kill the body. Southern Command conducted two deployments in Panama as a response to a coup in 1988 and Noriega's nullification of the presidential elections in May 1989. On December 19, 1989, Southern Command executed Operation Just Cause. SOF, helicopters and tanks had infiltrated over two days then the Rangers and a brigade of the 82nd Airborne Division parachuted in at H-hour. By the time the day was over, simultaneous strikes had caused the PDF to cease to exist.

There were only two C-141 capable airfields in the Panama City area. Since the primary means of deployment into Panama was by air and the US had to have two points of entry. This required the Rangers and 82nd to seize Torrijos-Tocumen International Airport. One platoon of the 403rd A/DACG parachuted in with the 82nd at Torrijos and another landed to run the operations at Howard Air Force Base.

The 7th Battalion sent elements from three units to set up and operate a Transportation Motor Pool (TMP), a Class IX supply point and two A/DACGs. The TMP run by the 126th Transportation Company and Class IX supply point run by the 249th Supply and 612th Quartermaster Companies along with the 129th Postal Detachment directly supported the XVIII Airborne Corps.

Operation Desert Shield/Storm

Operation Desert Shield/Storm was the next test for the 7th Transportation Battalion's soldiers. The battalion deployed almost 1,000 soldiers to Southwest Asia in August 1990. The battalion received recognition for its establishment of Log Base Charlie, with the movement of over 300,000 short tons of supplies. Additionally, the battalion ran the Transportation Consolidation Center-North, providing rapid redeployment support to the XVIII Airborne Corps units in a record 21 days and over 500 miles. The battalion drove over 6 million miles during these operations. Finally, the battalion provided rigging support throughout the entire theater of operations rigging in excess of 1,300 tons of supplies and dropped over 130 tons during the ground war.

7th Transportation Battalion riggers deployed to Turkey in support of Operation Provide Comfort rigging supplies for airdrop to the Kurdish refugees left stranded after war. The battalion's soldiers assisted in the rigging effort which resulted in over 7,000 CDS bundles dropped in a 30-day period. It is the largest humanitarian airdrop mission on record.

Next elements of the battalion deployed to support operations at Guantanamo Naval Base.

Hurricane Andrew hit Southern Florida devastating Dade County on 21 August 1992. It was the third strongest hurricane to hit the United States on record. Elements of the 7th Battalion deployed as part of Joint Task Force Andrew to provide relief in the form of food and shelter for the hurricane victims.

The 129th Postal Company deployed to Somalia in support of Operations Restore. In 1994, elements of the battalion deployed under the 46th Corps Support Group to Haiti in support of Operation Uphold Democracy in 1993.

Other elements deployed to Bosnia in support of United Nations peace keeping missions.

Operation Enduring Freedom, Afghanistan

In response to the terrorist attack on the World Trade Towers on 11 September 2001, President George Bush called it an act of war and determined to hunt down those responsible. Intelligence evidence indicated that the Islamic fundamentalist terrorist organization al-Qaeda led by Osama Bin Laden was responsible and hiding in Afghanistan. In October, the United States launched air attacks against the Taliban government harboring Bin Laden and sent in Special Forces. They opened up the logistic support base at Karshi-Khanabad, Uzbekistan, known by the soldiers as K2. In late November the Marines seized Kandahar and in December the 10th Mountain Division seized Bagram. These became the. Around February 2002, the 530th CSB moved by C-130 and opened up the Bagram APOD. The 7th Transportation Battalion replaced the 530th CSB at K2.

SPC Jason A. Disney, of the 7th Transportation Battalion, died shortly after sustaining injuries during a construction project when a piece of heavy equipment fell on him at Bagram Air Base. He died on 13 February 2002.

Operation Iraqi Freedom

The 7th Battalion deployed to Camp Anaconda, Iraq, and provided command and control for truck convoys in the most heavily ambushed area in Iraq, the Sunni Triangle.

On 12 January 2004, the 7th Transportation Battalion, commanded by LTC George G. Akin (OD) from Fort Bragg, North Carolina, arrived at LSA Anaconda to replace the 181st Battalion. Both of the 7th Battalion's 403rd Cargo Transfer Company and 508th Maintenance Company had already deployed during OIF I. The 403rd had a platoon at the SPOD and another at Balad, Iraq, so the Soldiers welcomed Akin when he arrived at Anaconda. The 7th Battalion completed its transfer of authority and replaced the 181st Transportation Battalion on 30 January.⁶

The mission of the 7th Battalion was to push supplies out to the forward operating bases (FOB) in Iraq, operate the Class III bulk fuel farm and operate the Ammunition Storage Area both located on Anaconda. The 528th POL Company operated the fuel farm and the 609th Ordnance Company operated the Ammunition Supply Point. The Battalion operated for the next 30-60 days with the companies it had inherited from the 181st Transportation Battalion. The transportation mission never stopped as these headquarters organized the relief in place of the following 13 transportation companies to include the contracted Iraqi provisional transportation company:⁷

196th Transportation Company (PLS)

253rd Transportation Company

629th Transportation Company (Medium Truck) (M931 w/30-ft trailer) (USAR PA)

705th Transportation Company (POL) (USAR)

1032nd Transportation Company (Medium Truck) (30-ft FMTV) (VA NG)

1460th Transportation Company (PLS) (MI NG)

1485th Transportation Company (Light/Medium Truck) (OH NG)

1742nd Transportation Company (SD NG)

2632nd Transportation Company (Light/ Medium Truck) (CA NG)

406th Transportation Detachment (Trailer Transfer Point) at Tallil Air Base

528th QM Company (Ft Lewis, WA)

608th OD Detachment

During their right-seat ride, LTC Akin liked the way the 181st Battalion operated. The gun truck ratio was one for every five task vehicles and a 25-vehicle convoy was the right size while 35 was too large. At that time, a gun truck was still any vehicle with a crew-served weapon. A recovery vehicle usually followed at the rear of the convoy since convoys did not stop along the side of the road to pull maintenance. Akin saw the importance of continuing the weekly Tiger Team Meetings as a collective forum for improving tactics, techniques and procedures (TTP) and sharing ideas. During the welcome brief by the 181st Battalion, they had told the 7th Battalion. "All you have to do here is get the mission done and go home." It would not as easy for the 7th Battalion as it

⁶ Akin interview.

⁷ Akin interview.

had for the 181st. Over the next year, the war would change and the 7th Transportation Battalion would bear the heaviest brunt of convoy attacks by the insurgents.⁸

The most important TTP for security was speed. Convoys still only ran during the daylight hours and at that time, the convoys traveled either down one lane or the other depending upon the location of likely IEDs. The convoys only traveled down the middle lane when there were three lanes of traffic. The emphasis was still not to be a burden on the local Iraqis. Civil Affairs policy was, “We have interrupted their commerce trade. We are not respecting them as a sovereign.” Civilian traffic was allowed to pass convoys and the trucks were not allowed to bump Iraqi cars to get them out of the way. The threat level was still only IEDs and small arms fire from three to four people.⁹

Over the next two months, new truck companies arrived to conduct the relief in place (RIP) of the old ones. Akin’s policy was for the replacing unit to drive down to Kuwait, pick up their replacement company and escort them back to Anaconda. The 1462nd Medium Truck actually took fire on the way up and lost one vehicle with one Soldier wounded. The seven-day transfer of authority would consist of a right-seat/left-seat ride to teach the new companies the routes, ROEs and tactics, techniques and procedures. During the RIP/TOA, the 7th Battalion picked up the following companies:¹⁰

- 369th Transportation Company (PLS) (USAR KS)
- 630th Transportation Company (Medium Truck) (USAR)
- 644th Transportation Company (Medium Truck) (USAR)
- 660th Transportation Company (POL) (USAR)
- 724th Transportation Company (POL) (USAR)
- 744th Transportation Company (Light/Medium Truck) (USAR)
- 1052nd Transportation Company (Medium Truck) (SC NG)
- 1171st Transportation Company (Medium Truck) (TN NG)
- 1462nd Transportation Company (Medium Truck) (IL NG)
- 2632nd Air Expeditionary Force Transportation Company (USAF) (Gun Truck)
- 528th QM Naval Detachment

The 7th Transportation Battalion also inherited the Allied Trade Workshop referred to as the “Skunk Werks” from the 181st Transportation Battalion. Skunk Werks was named after the laboratory in the “Lil’ Abner” cartoon. The welders of the Skunk Werks specialized in custom armoring for vehicles resulting in improvised armor more commonly known as “hillbilly armor.”

On 5 April 2004, the radical young cleric Muqtada al Sadr called for a jihad against coalition forces. His objective was to gain control over three towns; al Kut, An Najaf, and Sadr City named after his grandfather. On Thursday night, 8 April, his Madhi Militia dropped eight bridges and overpasses surrounding Convoy Support Center Scania thus severing all northbound traffic into the Sunni Triangle. The next day, Good Friday, his militia ambushed any and every convoy entering or leaving Baghdad International

⁸ Akin interview.

⁹ Akin interview.

¹⁰ Akin interview.

Airport (BIAP). That day, the 724th POL escorted a KBR fuel convoy to BIAP and was ambushed. Eight KBR drivers were killed, one missing, two soldiers were reported killed, and 16 civilians and soldiers were wounded. The KBR convoy commander, Tommy Hamill, was captured but later escaped. SPC Matt Maupin was initially listed as the first soldier missing in action, but his corpse was later discovered in 2008. This was the worst convoy ambush of the war. Operating in the heart of the Sunni Triangle, the 7th Transportation Battalion would lose more truck drivers than any truck unit that served in Iraq.

Improvements were made to armor, and the 13th Corps Support Command (COSCOM) standardized the size of convoys based upon the 7th Battalion standard. Convoys should not exceed 30 vehicles with a gun truck ratio of 1:5. Iraq-based convoys had priority in receiving factory built M1114 up-armored HMMWVs and other experimental armor such as the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL) gun box kit for the 5-ton.

The 7th Transportation Battalion summed up their accomplishments:

"From January through December 2004, the 7th Transportation Battalion (Airborne) provided command and control for thirteen companies and mastered the complexities of day-to-day service support operations for the largest ammunition supply point in Iraq, a three million gallon petroleum bag farm, and eleven transportation companies providing transportation, ammunition, and bulk fuel distribution to CJTF-7 and MNC-I units in combat. This joint battalion from Fort Bragg, North Carolina trained, integrated, and synchronized one Navy, two Air Force, and nine Army companies with over 1,548 soldiers, sailors and airmen in the heart of the Sunni Triangle at Balad, Iraq. Undaunted by maintaining span of control for a brigade sized unit with a battalion staff, Orient Express officers, NCOs and soldiers developed a highly performing organization with discipline and integrity. 7th Transportation Battalion conducted an average of 15 combat convoys with 300 vehicles on a daily basis to provide assured delivery while driving 1,000,000 miles per month in the unforgiving desert environment. Despite the blistering OPTEMPO, disciplined soldiers accumulated 11 million miles transporting over 29 million gallons of fuel and 424,000 STONs of cargo while maintaining an incredible 95% equipment readiness rating. Every convoy was a movement to contact, requiring aggressive tactics, techniques, procedures and bottom up innovation. The battalion operated its own add on armor facility with local national welders and procured steel, ballistic blankets, and Mylar Blastguard to outfit 67 gun trucks and 373 M915 tractors to improve the lethality and survivability of all tactical transportation convoys. Orient Express truck drivers' courage and tenacity became legendary as they fought through over 254 enemy attacks while enduring small arms fire, rocket propelled grenades and improvised explosive devices to deliver critical fuel and supplies to 1st CAV, 1st ID, 1st AD, and I MEF. Despite casualties exceeding one hundred personnel, 7th Transportation Battalion convoys operated day and night to deliver the goods regardless of enemy activity or MSR status. Battalion units have paid a heavy price with the tragic loss of nine courageous soldiers who made the ultimate sacrifice. At the height of the Sadr Milita uprising in April 2004, it was an Orient Express emergency fuel convoy that traveled over 400 miles, negotiating destroyed bridges, enemy hot spots, and stalled convoys in twenty-four hours to deliver critical class III and prevented the LSA Anaconda bag farm from running dry. The 7th Transportation Battalion sacrificed with honor and

professionalism to complete every mission and lived up to its motto of providing "On Time, On Target!" support.¹¹

The 7th Transportation Battalion, commanded by LTC Allen Keifer (QM), had arrived in Kuwait on 12 March and completed transfer of authority (TOA) with the 2nd Battalion, 121st Infantry (GA NG) on 1 April 2006. The 7th Transportation Battalion was attached to the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 34th Infantry Division (1-34 BCT) at Camp Cedar II in southern Iraq. The 1-34 BCT inherited the security force mission with two battalions and organized all the transportation assets under the 7th Transportation Battalion. The 250th and 308th Transportation Companies arrived with the 7th Battalion on the same day. The 1451st Transportation Company arrived at the end of March. The 7th Battalion picked up Kellogg Brown and Root (KBR) and Third County National (TCN) contract convoys from theater at Cedar and escorted them to their destinations: LSA Anaconda, Al Taqqadum (TQ), Taji, Baghdad International Airport (BIAP) and the Jordan border to pick up convoys on the western route, ASR Mobile. KBR ran an average of two to three Class III (fuel) convoys a day and Public Warehouse Centre (PWC) ran about the same number of Class I (provisions) convoys. The routes were divided into six zones:

Zone 1. Navistar to Tallil

Zone 2. Tallil to Scania

Zone 3. Scania to BIAP

Zone 4. BIAP to LSA Anaconda

Zone 5. Western route to the Jordan border

Zone 6. LSA Anaconda to Speicher

The 1-34th BCT originated the term Convoy Escort Team (CET). A CET had consisted of four Convoy Protection Platforms (CPP) more commonly known gun trucks to the crews. Because of the surge, the white trucks had increased from 20 to 30 vehicles per convoy. This required a reciprocal increase in the number of gun trucks (CPP) to six per convoy instead of four. It was not that the number of trucks that increased as much as the battalion had combined the assets to make larger convoys. More gun trucks provide greater flexibility.

In each zone the IED threat was different. Each zone was divided into boxes of named areas of interest. This threat was identified in the convoy commanders trail book. The convoys were escorted by CETs of four Convoy Protection Platforms each. The white (contract) trucks ran in convoys of 20 vehicles so four Convoy Protection Platforms provided the required 1:10 gun truck ratio for the contract. The 1-34th averaged about ten convoys daily requiring a total of 51 available CETs.

With four Convoy Protection Platforms, one (usually a M1114 up-armored HMMWV) ran out ahead about 300 to 500 meters as a scout vehicle. The other three Convoy Protection Platforms ran front, center and rear of the white trucks. The trail Convoy Protection Platform was called a "herder" because escorting TCNs was like herding cats. By the end of 7th Battalion's one year deployment, the 13th Sustainment Command (Expeditionary) in Anaconda directed that the brigade add a fifth Convoy Protection

¹¹ 7th Transportation Battalion MUC submission.

Platform to the convoy to augment the trail Convoy Protection Platform. This was in response to the enemy changing its TTP again and targeting the trail Convoy Protection Platform. The 11th Transportation Battalion arrived at Tallil to replace the 7th Transportation Battalion on 13 March 2007. The Battalion received the Meritorious Unit Commendation for this deployment.

The 7th Transportation Battalion deployed to Camp Arifjan, Kuwait in the summer of 2010.

The Total Army Assessment for 2010-2015 continued to reduce transportation companies, which reduced the need for transportation battalions. So the 7th Transportation Battalion at Fort Bragg, North Carolina was officially inactivated on 19 August 2011.